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A MESSAGE FROM THE AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING TO TOWN MEETING MEMBERS

May 5, 2014

Subject: **What's new at the Amherst Senior Center?**

In an attempt to keep Town officials better informed about what is happening at the Senior Center, the COA periodically makes an attempt to let them know about some of our activities.

One of the main concerns of the COA is the growing need for more space at the Senior Center. According to the 2010 COA Survey, two-thirds of Amherst residents over 70 and nearly 75% of all residents over 75 have or currently use our services. As the Baby Boomers add steadily to our census, the number and size of classes, services and programs has also increased and space is often a problem. The senior population in Amherst grew by 35% from 2000 to 2010. As a result of the growth and increased need for space and services, a Long Range Planning Committee was formed about three years ago to study the problem.

Members of the committee visited fifteen new senior centers in Massachusetts and Connecticut and developed information on what our needs would be for Amherst. We determined what size building would be necessary, the required number of rooms and their configuration, the number of parking spaces that would be needed and the site size required for a new senior center. The results of our study were sent to the Town Manager on February 28, 2012. The report included reasons for pursuing a new stand-alone senior center rather than a community center or a renovation and expansion of the Bangs Community Center (which was carefully considered). Any changes in Bangs would require bringing the entire building to code. Parking near Bangs is also a major problem.

The committee is now focusing on how to build a new structure and how to raise the money required to do so. To learn about the process involved we visited the Amherst Survival Center, the Northampton Senior Center, the Holyoke Senior Center and the Chicopee Senior Center, all of which have new structures. We spoke with the director at each center to learn about their site selection, planning/construction timeline, funding sources, and architect and project manager.

In January, David Stevens, Executive Director of the Mass COA, visited the Amherst Senior Center. He stated *"It is extremely sad that a Town as progressive as Amherst has a reduced footprint of its Senior Center. Seniors deserve better."*

Our committee questions why Holyoke spends \$52.15 per senior and Amherst spends only \$45.69 per senior.

As you know, the Senior Center is a place for nutritional, educational, physical, social and emotional support to elders. We provide programs and services that enhance dignity, support independence, maintain health, and promote the seniors' involvement in the community.

Our goal is to help elders maintain their independence.

Amherst needs a facility designed to meet that purpose. The Long Range Planning Committee will continue to work toward that goal. We will need community support to make it a reality.

GROWTH IN NUMBERS OF ELDERS 60+ IN AMHERST

